LECTURES ON MODERN MUSIC[1]

I

MODERN FRENCH MUSIC

LET us agree that by our title we mean French music of the post-Franckian period, the period inaugurated by the works of Fauré and Debussy. The classification is, of course, arbitrary, for naturally there is no sharp line of demarcation between the music of to-day and the music of yesterday. Music, like life, is in constant evolution. Its transformation goes on incessantly, but the process is so gradual that, for the most part, we remain quite unconscious of the nature and extent of the changes which are taking place before our very eyes. We are too inattentive, our minds too passive, to observe or record, to say nothing of understanding, them. It is so much easier to rest contented with what we have already acquired than to change ever so slightly those routine but profound habits of thought and feeling which govern our life, and by which we live so blissfully because so unconsciously. This mental inertia is, perhaps, our greatest enemy. Insidiously it leads us to assume that we can renew our lives without renewing our habits; that we can listen to the music of Stravinsky with ears attuned only to the harmonies of Beethoven and Wagner. But we cannot.

Consequently no one can "explain" modern music, make

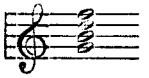
[1] Three lectures delivered under the auspices of the Lectureship in Music at the Rice Institute, in February, 1925, by Mlle. Nadia Boulanger, of Paris, France. The author gratefully acknowledges the kindness of Mr. Howard Hinners in editing the stenographic report of the lectures for publication.

it, by some miracle, immediately intelligible to people who have never heard a note of it or who will not make the effort to accustom themselves, by prolonged application, to new sonorities and, therefore, to new habits of hearing. All one can do is to try to stimulate the curiosity of those who have yet to make their first acquaintance with a modern score and to render more intelligent and precise the appreciation of those who have already learned to love a world of beauty in which they are not yet quite at home.

The harmony of modern music, especially its dissonance, is, of course, the chief stumbling block. That is natural and unavoidable, and the difficulties which it presents should not be under-estimated nor, on the other hand, exaggerated. The obstacle is obviously of a technical nature; it is a question of language, a matter of vocabulary and syntax and is therefore to be mastered like any linguistic problem—by the processes of mental and aural assimilation. To learn to speak a new language is difficult; but it is relatively easy to learn to understand it. So it is with modern harmony. At a first hearing, Stravinsky's "Sacred Rites of Spring" seems a mere uncoördinated mass of sound. But listen to it again and again and gradually the sense of confusion disappears. Little by little the "catching" quality of its themes and the electric force of the rhythms emerge, and the music becomes a thing so full of life and power that you marvel at your previous bewilderment.

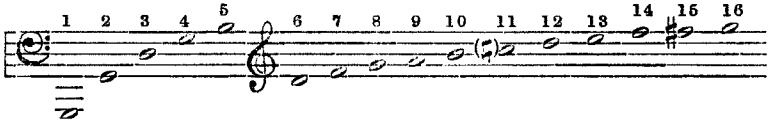
"The dissonances of to-day are the consonances of to-morrow"—an immemorial commonplace of musical history which every one knows in theory but whose force becomes apparent only by personal experience. To us it seems incredible that the interval of a third  was once considered harsh or that Monte-

verdi (1568-1643) should have had difficulty in securing *droit de cité* for the chord of the dominant seventh.

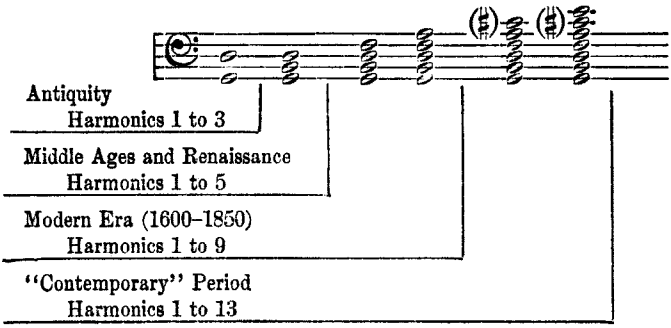


Yet we all know that such was the case and that such will always be the fate of every new "dissonance".

The history of harmony is the history of the development of the human ear, which has gradually assimilated, in their natural order, the successive intervals of the harmonic series:



The platitudinous validity of the statement becomes obvious by comparison of the harmonic series with the following table, which gives—with only approximate accuracy—the chief diatonic chords in use during the successive periods of musical history.



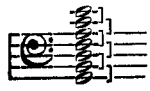
At first, some of these chords, notably the last four, were employed only on certain degrees of the scale, but now they are all in current use on every degree. Furthermore, composers no longer hesitate to alter (viz. to sharp or flat) any note, or any combination of notes, in any chord, a practice which is likewise justifiable by the phenomenon of

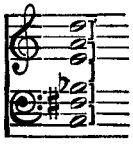
resonance the moment one admits the chord of three notes,

whose combined harmonic series give (enharmonically, viz., with F♯ = G♭, etc.) every note of the chromatic scale.

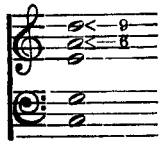
But such *a posteriori* apologies are rather ridiculous and must not be used to prove more than they actually do; namely, that there are no acoustical reasons why any combination of notes should not be used harmonically, that is, as a chord. Whether or not a given chord is beautiful, is another question, of an æsthetic, not a physical, order. The beauty of a chord, or of any other musical element, depends on its context. As Voltaire says, "The real art is in the *à propos*". (*Le grand art est dans l'à propos.*) Certain formulæ of chord progression are quite boresome when they occur in the music of a third-rate composer, but coming from the pen of a Fauré, the same locutions take on, by some miracle, the highest and most moving qualities of beauty. Why that should be we do not know, and do not need to know. It is one of the many mysteries of art which elude all efforts at analysis.

In the preceding table, all the chords are formed by the superposition of thirds, but in modern music we are obliged to recognize other methods of chord construction. Scriabine, for instance, uses (excessively, perhaps) a chord based on the superposition of fourths:





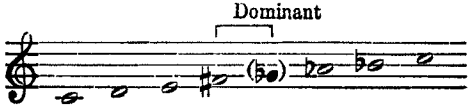
Debussy frequently adds a sixth and a ninth to major triads,



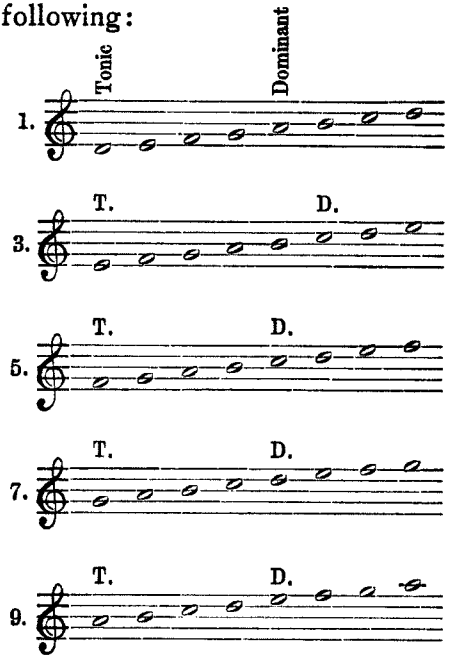
one of the many examples in modern music of so-called "unresolved appoggiaturas", that is, of notes foreign to a

chord, which do not resolve, as in the classics, or to integral notes of the chord. To consider such notes as non-harmonic tones is probably inaccurate, for they have gradually become part and parcel of the chord to which they were grafted. In short, they form new chords whose principles of formation have yet to be deduced and formulated.

More important, however, than the invention of new chords, is the use of other than our usual major, minor, and chromatic scales. Most people know that the whole



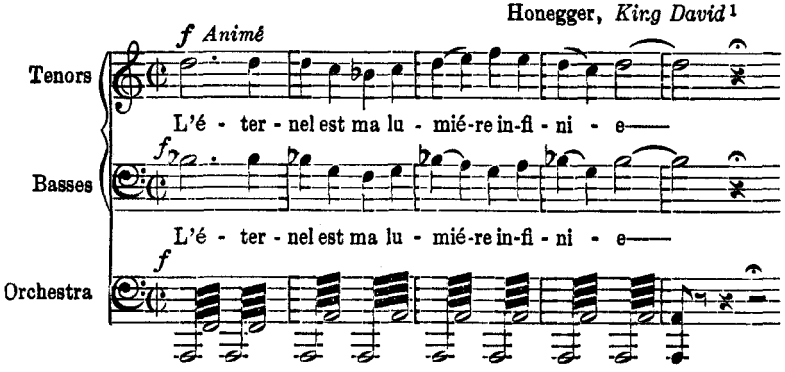
tone scale, is of frequent occurrence, for example, in the music of Debussy, but perhaps they are less conscious of the influence on modern harmony of the old church modes (themselves a survival of the antique Greek modes), especially the following:



These modes have, of course, been preserved in the Gregorian Chant, which is still the official music of the Catholic Church, and also in many of the countless European folk songs collected with such enthusiasm during the last forty years. A few examples will suffice to show the reality, if not the extent, of the influence:

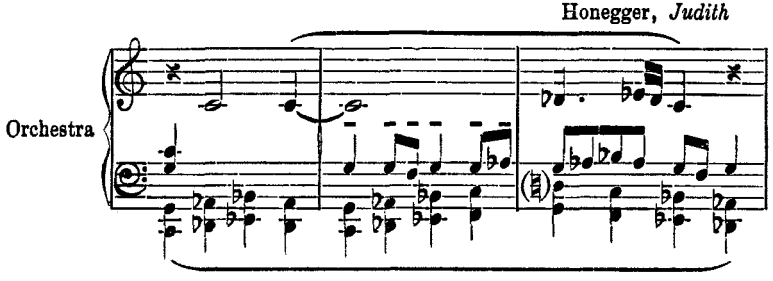
FIRST MODE

Honegger, *King David*[1]



THIRD MODE[2]

Honegger, *Judith*

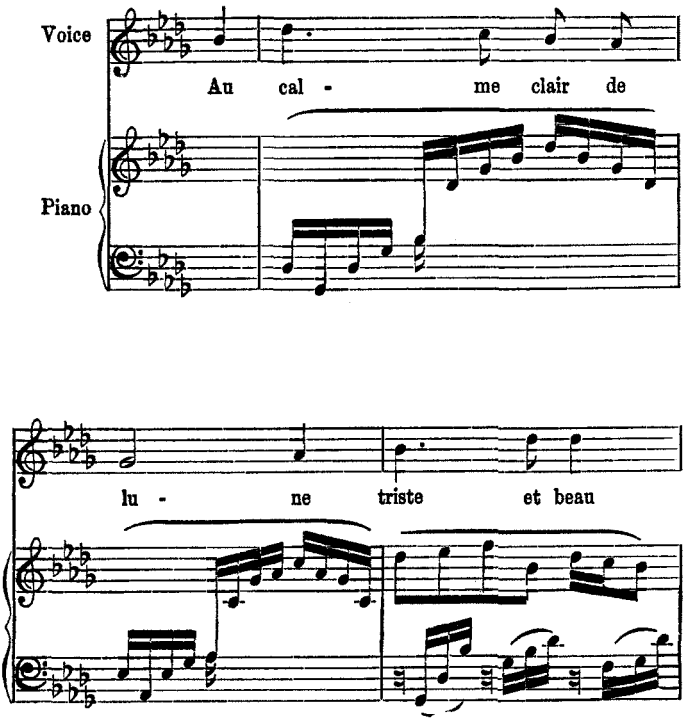


[1] I am indebted to Messrs. Rouart Lerolle, Sénart Hamelle, Fromont, Durand, Heugel, Mathot, Chester, Musique Russe, Bessel and Henn for the liberty of reproducing the examples cited in these Essays.

[2] In modern uses of this mode, the dominant is usually changed from the sixth to the fifth degree of the scale.

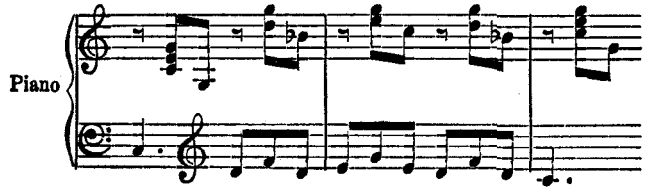
FIFTH MODE

Fauré, *Clair de Lune*



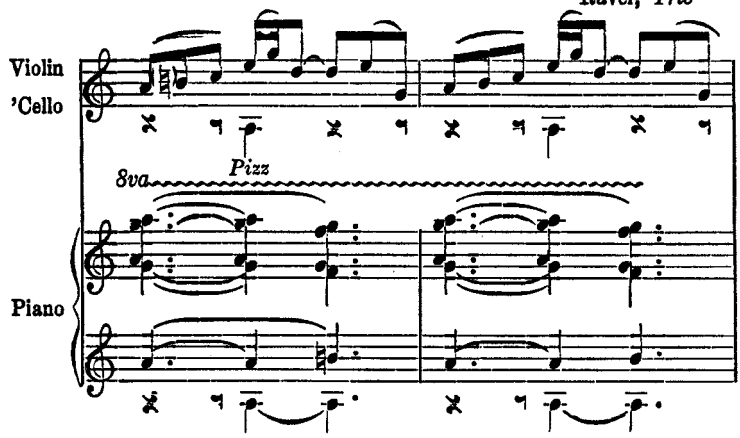
SEVENTH MODE

Debussy, *Mandoline*



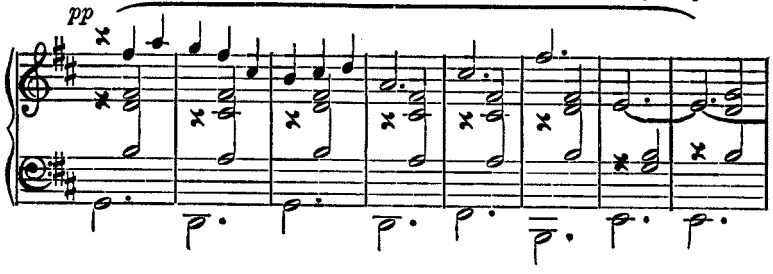
NINTH MODE

Ravel, *Trio*[1]

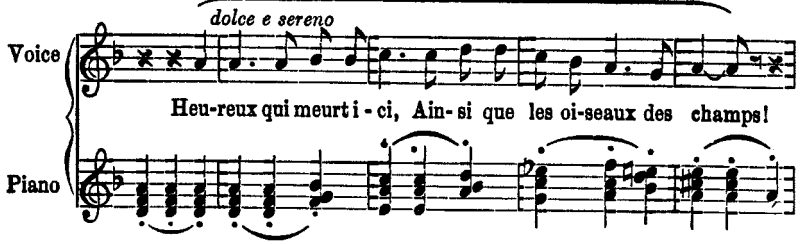


Equally characteristic are passages like the following, where, though it is not dominated by any single mode and though it contains modern characteristics, the harmony is nevertheless modal in its origins:

Satie, *First Gymnopédie*



Fauré, *At the Cemetery*



[1] The second theme of the first movement. The first theme is in the key of *A* minor with the sixth degree raised. In other words, both themes are based on scales having a common tonic, *A*, contrast being attained not, as in the classics, by a change of ***key,*** but by a change of ***mode.***

Various oriental and defective (five-note) scales are likewise to be found in modern music and we shall have occasion to refer to them specifically in our discussion of the works of Roussel and Debussy.[1]

Recent composers, notably, Debussy, Schmitt, Roussel and Ravel, have devoted considerable attention to rhythmical problems, and their compositions contain many significant innovations in this domain. But to avoid repetition, it will be better to leave detailed discussion of this aspect of modern music for our lecture on Stravinsky.

I am sorry to have remained so long on purely technical ground. My only justification for so doing is that the main difficulty which modern music presents, not only to the layman but to the trained musician as well, is the difficulty inherent in the technical structure of its language. When once the language has been mastered, the "problem" of modern music becomes non-existent. It is impossible therefore to have too much technical knowledge. On the contrary, one never has enough.

Before passing on to our study of individual composers, may I say that it is only with regret and because they are naturally excluded by the limits of my subject, that I refrain from giving prolonged attention to the works of various Italian, Russian, German and other European composers. France has always been quick to recognize beauty and merit wherever they happened to be found[2] and I feel almost as though I were being unfaithful to the traditions of my country in not speaking of such men as de Falla, Malipiero, Szymanowski, Bartok, Schoenberg, etc. Their work is of

[1] For a detailed account of the characteristics and evolution of modern harmony, see Charles Koechlin's masterly essays in Lavignac's *Encyclopédie de la Musique et Dictionnaire du Conservatoire,* 2° partie Vol. I; also Casella's admirable book on *The Evolution of Music.*

[2] In fact, she has sometimes been even too generous in this respect and has frequently recognized foreign merit before, and at the expense, of native achievements.

first-rate significance and I am sorry that we can give it only passing mention instead of the detailed study which it deserves.

Fauré, Debussy and Stravinsky [1] are, of course, the chief figures in the musical history of the last thirty-five years. The work of Debussy and Stravinsky is known, if it is not always understood, the world over; but Fauré, who is perhaps the greatest of the three, is still practically unknown outside of France.

The simple facts of his life are quickly told. He was born in Pamiers (Ariège) on May 13, 1845, and educated in Paris at the École Niedermeyer. This last detail is of some importance because of the emphasis which that institution laid on training in the church modes and Gregorian Chant and because of the rather special manner in which it taught harmony, a manner which favored the use of altered chords and consequently encouraged those subtle allusions to remote keys that are so characteristic of Fauré's music. "Another main feature in the organization of the school", as Fauré himself said, "was that . . . instruction in the humanities was given hand in hand with the musical training and, . . . being run on the dormitory system of a boarding school, there was less scattering and dispersion of one's time and forces, less of that counsel coming from left and right, which is generally as fatal as it is contradictory, and finally, simply from the standpoint of music, there were fewer pernicious contacts".

His course of study completed, Fauré began his career as an organist, first in Rennes, later in Paris, at various churches, and finally at the Église de la Madeleine. In 1896 he was appointed professor of composition at the

[1] These last two composers have been left for separate study in the succeeding lectures.

Paris Conservatoire, and nine years later became its director, a position which he held until 1920. Distinction followed distinction: he was elected to the Institute (1909) and given the grade of Commander of the Legion of Honor (1910)[1]. Several years later, the entire nation in the persons of the President of the Republic, the Premier and members of the cabinet, did him national homage during a special celebration held in his honor at the Sorbonne, a distinction that has been conferred on only one other person —Pasteur. Fauré died November 3, 1924, and was buried with all the pomp and splendor suggested by the phrase "funérailles nationales".

The man himself was extraordinary in his utter normality and simplicity, his unaffected goodness and kindliness of spirit. As Vuillermoz has said, "No artist has ever been more intensely, more profoundly loved. Great geniuses of the past have been given more solemn tributes of admiration, have called forth more demonstrative enthusiasm; they have acted with more intensity on the crowd and known a more universal and noisy fame; but none of them, in departing, have made hearts grieve more painfully". It was impossible to know Fauré without loving him. The greater his renown, the more unconscious did he become of his own glory. As some one has said, "The man was so perfectly simple, that he seemed not to understand what people meant when they spoke of his simplicity". During his long years of professorship at the Conservatoire, never, in any class, did he let fall one word about himself or his work. The testimony of his pupils in this respect is unanimous. Had they not become acquainted with his music through the natural channels of the concert hall and the

[1] He was later promoted to the highest rank which the Legion of Honor offers.

publishing house, they would never have known that Fauré, the teacher, was Fauré, the composer.

The atmosphere of his classroom, as I can testify from personal experience, was one of sanity and freedom, quite exempt from dogmatism and that narrow spirit of sect and school which we associate with even the best of educational institutions. As a teacher, he seemed to have but one principle: to understand his pupils, to adapt himself to their individual personalities and help them to find their own particular road to artistic self-realization. Distinguished musicians of opposing temperament and talents—Ravel, Schmitt, Roger-Ducasse, Aubert, Enesco, Koechlin, etc.—lived in the shadow of his personality without ever feeling the slightest sense of constraint. It was he who understood them and not they who had to understand him.

Like Mozart, Fauré is essentially a "musician's composer". The unique concentration of his style, his refinement and his grace are of the sort that sum up centuries of previous culture and development, which can be loved by any sensitive spirit, but which only the trained musician can perhaps fully appreciate. For a foreigner the problem is perhaps even more difficult, for Fauré's music, like the dramas of Racine, is essentially French. Before its deceptive elegance, an Anglo-Saxon or a German sometimes feels those movements of impatience and irritation which the music of Brahms or Malher tends to provoke in a Frenchman.

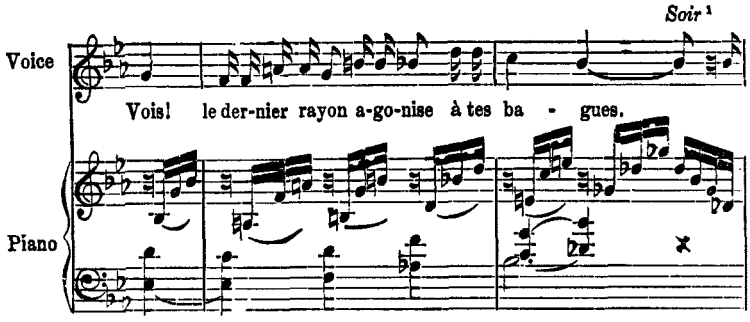
But in all such cases of national differences, longer acquaintance is an easy and a certain remedy, and in the end one finds oneself loving the very qualities which at first seemed so repellent. Also we must remember that, as Gide has said, "it is in being the most individual that one is the most universal".

The simplicity of Fauré's music has deceived even his compatriots. For many of them, Fauré is still a mere "charming musician" and nothing more, for, to be sure, his music, like the music of Mozart again, is the very quintessence of charm. But its charm is the charm of the aristocrat; it is the cloak of discretion and restraint that go with gentle manners and high breeding. For Fauré, in spite of his humble origins—his father was an inspector of primary schools in the provinces—is a patrician. His smiling suavity disdains all violence of mood or gesture and shuns the solemn effects of oratory and eloquence. He is never agressive, but conceals his strength beneath the quiet force of the unemphatic voice and the untroubled serenity of a soul that has found inner peace and certitude.

The technical characteristics of his music? They are difficult to discover and, because of their utter naturalness, embarrassing to state. The tonality, chords, rhythms and forms which Fauré uses are the same as they were when he first began to serve music, but, in his hands, these ordinary elements have become precious. Insensibly, year by year and work by work, he made them so perfectly his own that, old when he was young, they were still young when he was old. Even now, when he is dead and gone, they have lost no whit of their freshness, of their perennial charm.

Fauré has been called "the most suave of revolutionaries", and the epithet is just and merited. The syntax of modern harmony owes more to his music than we as yet realize. His vocabulary, to be sure, is the vocabulary of every one, the vocabulary of the classics: triads, seventh chords and an occasional ninth; but in his work these routine harmonies follow each other in a manner so distinctive, so ineffably personal, that they seem quite new, entirely original. The extraordinary ease and freedom which charac-

terize, as in the following measures, his use of seventh chords,

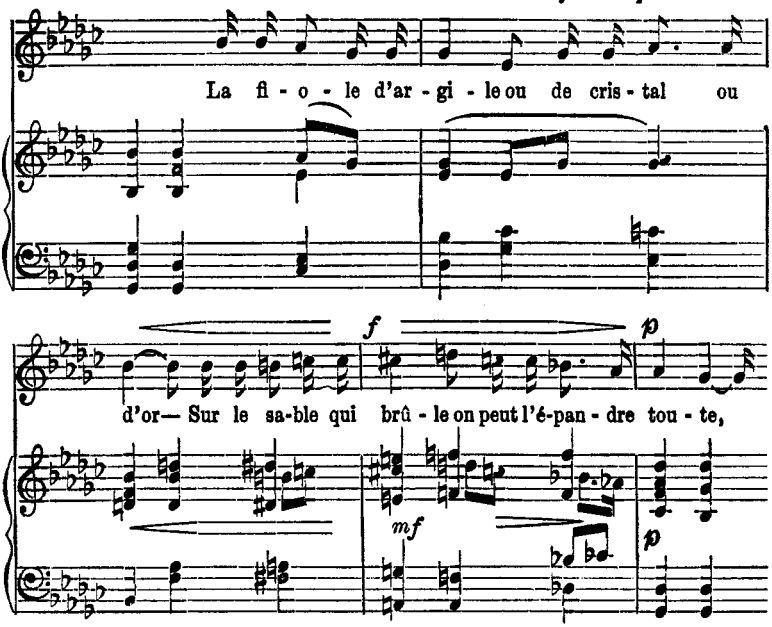


prepared the way for countless later liberties in Ravel and Debussy and clearly foreshadow the latter composer's manner of connecting chords of the ninth.

But, needless to say, in spite of some such minor technical resemblances, the harmony of Fauré and the harmony of Debussy are radically different. Harmony, for Fauré, is an element of design, whereas Debussy tends to conceive it rather as a source of color. Fauré etches in even the most subtle of his modulations with the sharp, fine lines of a pen. You never know to what key he is leading you, but when you reach your tonal destination, there is never any doubt as to its location. Indeed, you feel almost as though it would have been impossible to have gone elsewhere and you wonder only at the beauty of the voyage and at the skill of your guide who, in coming, has led you so quickly and surely through so many lands. The subtlety of Fauré's transitory modulations, the ease and naturalness with which he alludes to the most remote keys, are the mind's sheerest delight. Take, for example, a passage like the following:

[1] This particular song, it is true, is a late work and dates from 1900, but the same characteristics of harmonic progression are to be found in germ (but for that reason, none the less unmistakably) in the early compositions.

La Parfum Impérissable



One knows not what to admire most in such harmony: the richness and accuracy of its allusions to foreign keys or the deftness with which it returns to the point from which it started.

As the above citations show, Fauré, like Wagner, is one of the few composers who conceive tonality as a mobile and not a static state. Yet there is no direct filiation between the two men. One of the most extraordinary aspects of Fauré's music and one that says much for the power and independence which lurk beneath the charm of his personality, is that never can one say that such or such a piece was written under the influence of such and such a composer. Yet Fauré witnessed the rise and decline of reputations like Wagner, Frank, Strauss, Debussy, and lived to see the beginning of Stravinsky's fame. He took an active and

sympathetic interest in their music but never was in the slightest danger of losing his artistic equilibrium, his natural independence of style. Strange as it may seem, he owes most to Gounod and Bach,[1] to the delicacy and suavity of the one and to the other's incomparable sense of self-unfolding melody.

Consider, for instance, the *Allegro Moderato* of the "Second Quintet". In reality, the entire movement represents a single, long line. Cadences there are, many plagal, two or three perfect, most of them deceptive; but very few of them, until the last pages of the coda, have the punctuative value of a period. Most of them are commas or at best, semicolons. Consequently, first, transition and secondary themes, development, recapitulation, and coda constitute not so many sections of a sonata form, but a single, uninterrupted melody which grows and unfolds with miraculous fecundity and naturalness. The resulting impression of freshness and youth is incredible, coming, as it does, from the pen of an old man of seventy-six.

Ordinarily, it is sad to grow old, but not so with Fauré. To age, for him, meant a quiet process of selection, the gradual liberation of his spirit, which, by a long and joyfully accepted discipline, had eliminated all that was useless and ephemeral and freed itself of "every earthborn care". One feels that he regarded death in much the same way as Bach regarded it, as a natural goal and not a danger, as a state to be desired rather than feared. Here the great Protestant cantor and Fauré, the Catholic, have "ascended to meet". Works, for instance, like Bach's Choral Prelude for Organ, "O Man, Bewail thy Grievous Sin", and Fauré's "Requiem",[2] are both inspired by a similar, mys-

[1] Saint-Saëns, his teacher and life-long friend, must also have initiated him into some of the secrets of logical and lucid form.

[2] Cf. also "O mort, poussière d'étoiles".

tical view of religion and death, a view so high and serene that, in its presence, differences of creed and dogma fade into insignificance.

The Church can absolve and sustain, but also judge and condemn us. Unlike Bach, Fauré has never given expression to this latter and menacing aspect of his faith. Religion, he understands more in the manner of the Gospel according to St. John, in the manner of Saint Francis and Fra Angelico, than of Bossuet or Saint Bernard. He finds in it a source of love, not of fear. If, as in the "Requiem", he sings of the grief which death inspires, it is a grief so near to God as to be wholly free from vain revolt or lamentation. What dominates the quite impersonal tenderness of the music, is the sense of certain pardon, the serene expectation of eternal rest.

This note of certainty, of inner peace, is never absent from his work and explains, in part, at least, the man's deep and abiding joy in life. Every note he wrote—even of the works which chant the soul's nostalgia for the other world—attests his love of life, his love of loving it and the keen delight he felt at the mere perception that an object was lovely or a line beautiful. In this and other respects, he is Greek rather than Christian. He has the Greek's sense of measure and sobriety. Like Plato, he feels a sort of ecstasy before the austere though sensuous beauty of form or line. Take "Danseuse" (*The Dancer*) the last song in "Mirages"; its cool, detached beauty suggests the chaste contours, the sharp and clear designs of a Greek vase. One is reminded of Valéry's phrase, "I look upon this woman who is walking and yet who gives me a sense of immobility". (*Je contemple cette femme qui marche et qui me donne le sentiment de l'immobilité.*)

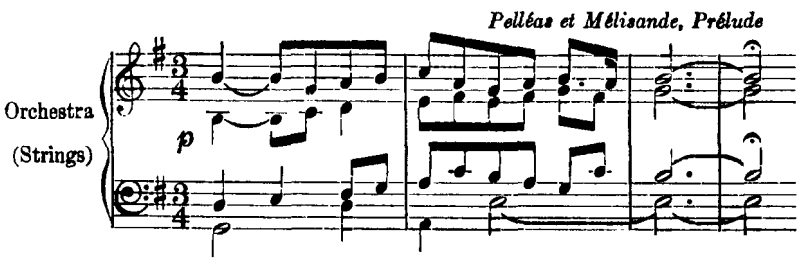
Fauré is indeed an "Attic musician", and one might very well think that these lines from "Eupalinos",[1] which describe with such penetrating subtlety the spirit of Greek architecture, were intended rather for the composer of "Pénélope"—so vividly do they suggest his idea of modulation, his sense of balance and proportion: "Like those orators and poets of whom you were thinking a moment ago, he [the architect] knew, O Socrates, the virtue of imperceptible modulations. Before his delicately lightened masses, in appearance, so simple, no one was conscious of the fact that, by these insensible curves, these minute but all powerful inflexions and by these profound combinations of the regular and irregular which had been introduced, hidden and rendered as imperious as they were indefinable, he was being led to a sort of happiness. They made the moving spectator docile to their invisible presence, caused him to pass from vision to vision, from absolute silence to murmurs of pleasure in proportion as he advanced, retreated, or approached again to wander, moved by its beauty, and the puppet of admiration, within the radius of the building. It is necessary, said this man of Megara, that my temple move men as they are moved by the objects of their love".

We have scarcely touched on the music itself. I would have preferred to play it rather than write about it, or, since that is impossible, to quote whole pages of Fauré's works. But lack of space forbids and I must content myself with enumerating—in an order which may facilitate making his acquaintance—the most characteristic of his compositions: "Les Berceaux" (*The Cradles*),[2] "Aurore"

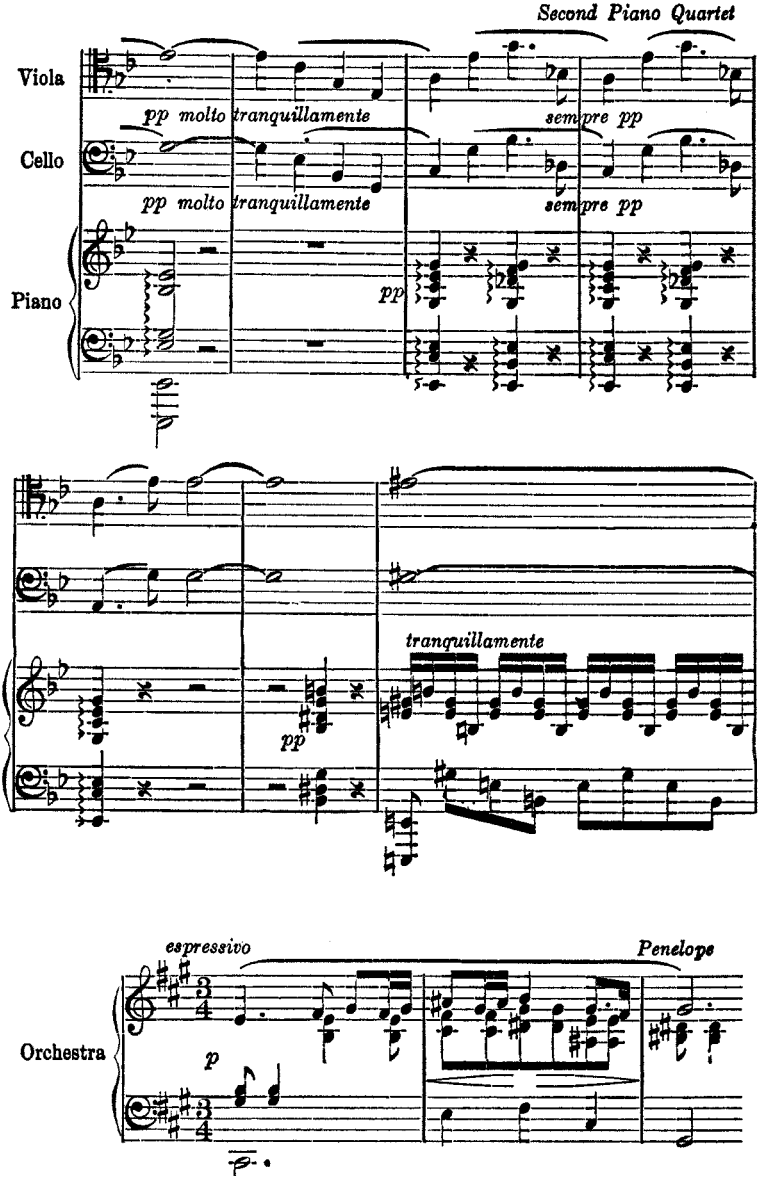
[1] Likewise by Valéry.
[2] In second volume of his "Mélodies", published by Hamelle, Paris.

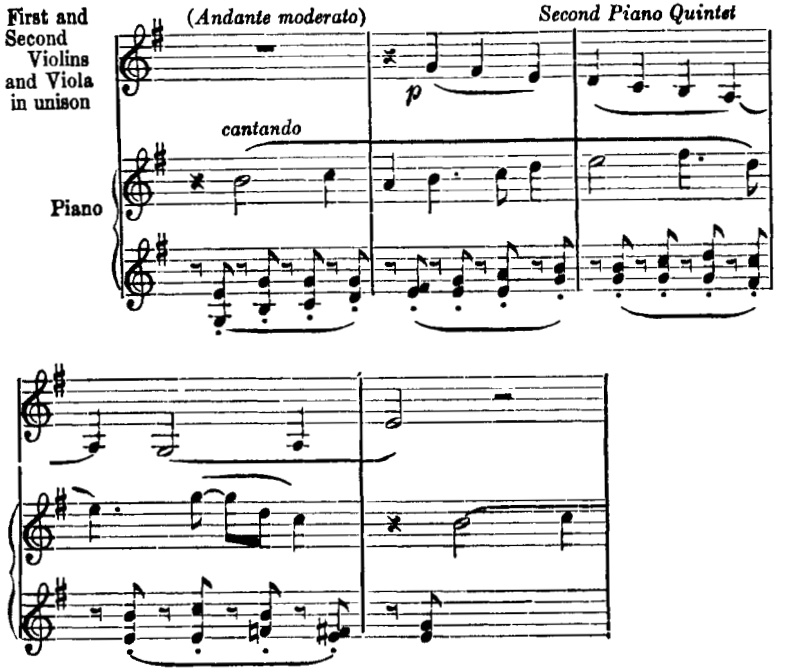
(*Dawn*),[1] "Les Roses d'Ispahan" (*The Roses of Ispahan*),[1] "Claire de Lune" (*Moonlight*),[1] "Au Cimetière" (*At the Cemetery*),[2] "Prison", "Soir" (*Evening*),[2] "La Bonne Chanson"[3] "Pelléas et Mélisande" (orchestral suite)[3] "Elégie" (Cello and piano),[3] Sixth,[3] Seventh[3] and Ninth[5] "Nocturnes" (for piano), Fifth "Barcarolle" (piano), "Second Piano Quartet",[3] "Thèmes et Variations",[3] (piano) "Requiem",[3] "La Chanson d'Eve" (*Eve's Song*),[5] "Le Parfum Impérissable" (*The Undying Fragrance*),[2] "First Cello Sonata",[4] "Second Piano Quintet",[4] "Penelope",[7] "L'Horizon Chimérique" (*The Chimerical Horizon,* songs),[4] *"Mirages"*, (songs),[4] "Second Violin Sonata",[4] "First Piano Quintet",[6] "Thirteenth Nocturne" (piano),[4] and the "String Quartet".[4]

In conclusion, may I cite a few of the shorter phrases or themes. Their beauty speaks so eloquently as to make all comment superfluous and, after all, citation is the only satisfactory manner of writing about music.



[1] In the second volume of his "Mélodies", published by Hamelle, Paris.
[2] In third volume of his "Mélodies", published by Hamelle, Paris.
[3] Published by Hamelle, Paris.
[4] Published by Durand et Cie, Paris.
[5] Published by Heugel, Paris.
[6] Published by Schirmer, New York.
[7] Fauré's only opera; a masterpiece which a poor libretto and inadequate orchestration may banish from the stage. It is published by Hamelle.


Second Piano Quartet
Viola
Cello
Piano
pp molto tranquillamente
sempre pp
pp molto tranquillamente
sempre pp
pp
tranquillamente
pp
espressivo
Penelope
Orchestra
p



Of all his disciples, Roger-Ducasse is the one who was and still remains closest to the spirit of Fauré.

His work is full of emotion, but, at times, one must seek to find it, for it is concealed beneath the somewhat objective brilliance and richness of his style and is held well in control by a mind of unusual power that takes especial delight in clarity of form and solidity of musical construction. One is tempted to apply to him Maurras's sentence about the Greeks: "Feeling pervaded and troubled their conduct, but it was reason which they placed on their altars". (*Le sentiment agitait toute leur conduite, et c'est la raison qu'ils mirent sur leur autel.*)

The "Sarabande", one of the most moving works written in the period we are studying, the "Piano Quartet", the "Pastorale for Organ" and the "Spring Nocturne" for

orchestra—to mention only a few titles—are full of tenderness and are manifestly the product of a deep, strong personality. He who would become acquainted, from a different angle, with its force and its charm, has only to read the article [1] which Roger-Ducasse wrote on the chamber music of Fauré, for it gives many an illuminating insight into the quality and penetration of his mind and into the beauty of the relationship which bound him in lifelong affection to his "master".

We turn now to Ravel and Schmitt.

Maurice Ravel, born 1875, because of the almost miraculous perfection of his technique, has been called the "Swiss watchmaker" of modern music. He is the perfect example of the "maître", in the sense that conception and execution seem to represent for him but a single creative process. He can do what he likes. Whatever task he sets himself—whether it be to write a virtuoso work, like "La Valse", for full orchestra, an unaccompanied "Sonata for Violin and Cello", or a song like "Ronsard à son âme" (*Ronsard to his Soul*) where a long, tenuous line of open fifths, played by a single hand, suffices to accompany the voice—is accomplished with astonishing ease and mastery. His command over the manifold resources of the orchestra is prodigious and he moves with facility and evident delight in the most dangerous realms of orchestral virtuosity.

For many people, Ravel is still a lesser Debussy, a mere shadow of the great impressionist. The mistake is understandable but quite unjust to Ravel. There are, to be sure, obvious points of contact between the two men: their mutual repudiation of romantic "eloquence", their veneration for Rameau and Couperin, a common inclination to exoticism and certain similarities of harmonic technique and

[1] In the 1922, October number of the *Revue Musicale.*

of piano and orchestral writing. But, nevertheless, the styles of the two composers remain distinct and, what is more important, their personalities differ profoundly.

In spite of the modern character of his style, and in spite of his many works in the impressionistic manner [1] (e.g. "Jeux d'Eau", *Fountains;* "Gaspard de la Nuit", *Gaspard of the Night;* "Trois Poèmes de Mallarmé", etc.), Ravel's deepest affiliations are with the eighteenth century. He has its love of sharp outlines, of concise and lucid form, no little of its ironic wit and humor (e.g. the "Histoires Naturelles", *Stories from Nature;* and "L'Heure Espagnole", *The Spanish Hour*) and his music, like that of the clavecinists, springs from the dance,[2] incarnates its spirit of vivacious movement, its "ever new and delightful pleasure in a useless occupation".

The quotation, which serves as motto to the "Valses Nobles et Sentimentales", suggests another eighteenth-century aspect of Ravel's art, namely, its exquisite delight in the world of elves and fairies. The fantastic and chimerical have always fascinated artists and probably always will, for they are part of the eternal romanticism of the human spirit. The trait itself, therefore, is not characteristic of any one epoch. Nevertheless, one feels that Ravel's appreciation of the fantastic is more akin to the spirit of Perrault's "Fairy Tales" than it is, say, to Hugo's "Djinns" or to the sumptuous and exotic color of "The Golden Cock". Fairies, for Ravel, are the pretext for a fine and aimless vagabondage of the mind rather than a spur to the curiosity of the sensibility. All his fancies are tinged with a quaint whimsicality, a certain intellectual quality of playfulness

[1] But not the least salient feature of even these works is the clarity of their key-scheme and the precision of their form.

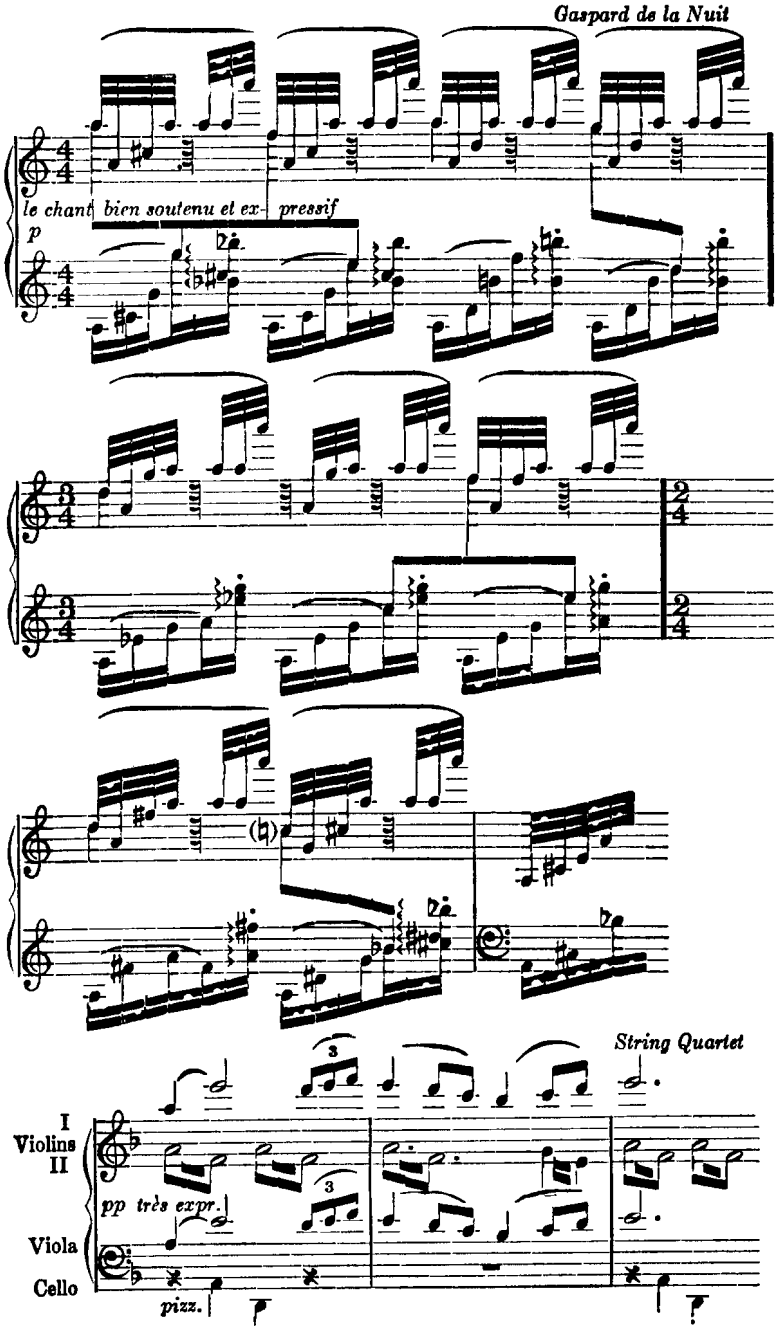
[2] e.g. "Menuet Antique", "Alborada del gracioso", "Valses Nobles et Sentimentales", "Sonatine", "Le Tombeau de Couperin", "Trio", "Rapsodie Espagnole", and "La Valse", etc.

that is given very well by these lines from Madame d'Aulnoy's "Green Serpentine", which appear as sub-title to one of the pieces in the "Mother Goose Suite" and which are dedicated to "Little Miss Ugly, Empress of the Pagodas":[1] "She undressed and entered her bath. Immediately little idols began to sing and play. Some had theorbos made of nutshells, others, viols, made from the husks of almonds—for it was necessary to proportion the instruments to the size of the performers".

Finally, Ravel belongs to the eighteenth century by virtue of his reticence. As Roland-Manuel, the composer's gifted disciple and friend, has said: "It is not necessary to know Maurice Ravel personally nor to have penetrated very far into the essentials of his thought to convince oneself that the methods of this musician, his technique and, indeed, his entire art imply a process of voluntary research and the distrust of inspiration. . . . If his music pleases, moves you, or calls forth your tears, know that it was composed by a man who dropped to his knees neither 'before nor after', who did not weep in writing it and who, like a certain great poet, thinks that 'he who would write his dream, owes it to himself to be infinitely alert and awake' ".

Not that Ravel's music is without life or feeling. On the contrary, phrases like the following:

[1] "Laideronette, Impératrice des Pagodes."


Gaspard de la Nuit
le chant bien soutenu et ex- pressif
p
String Quartet
I
Violins
II
pp très expr.
Viola
Cello
pizz.

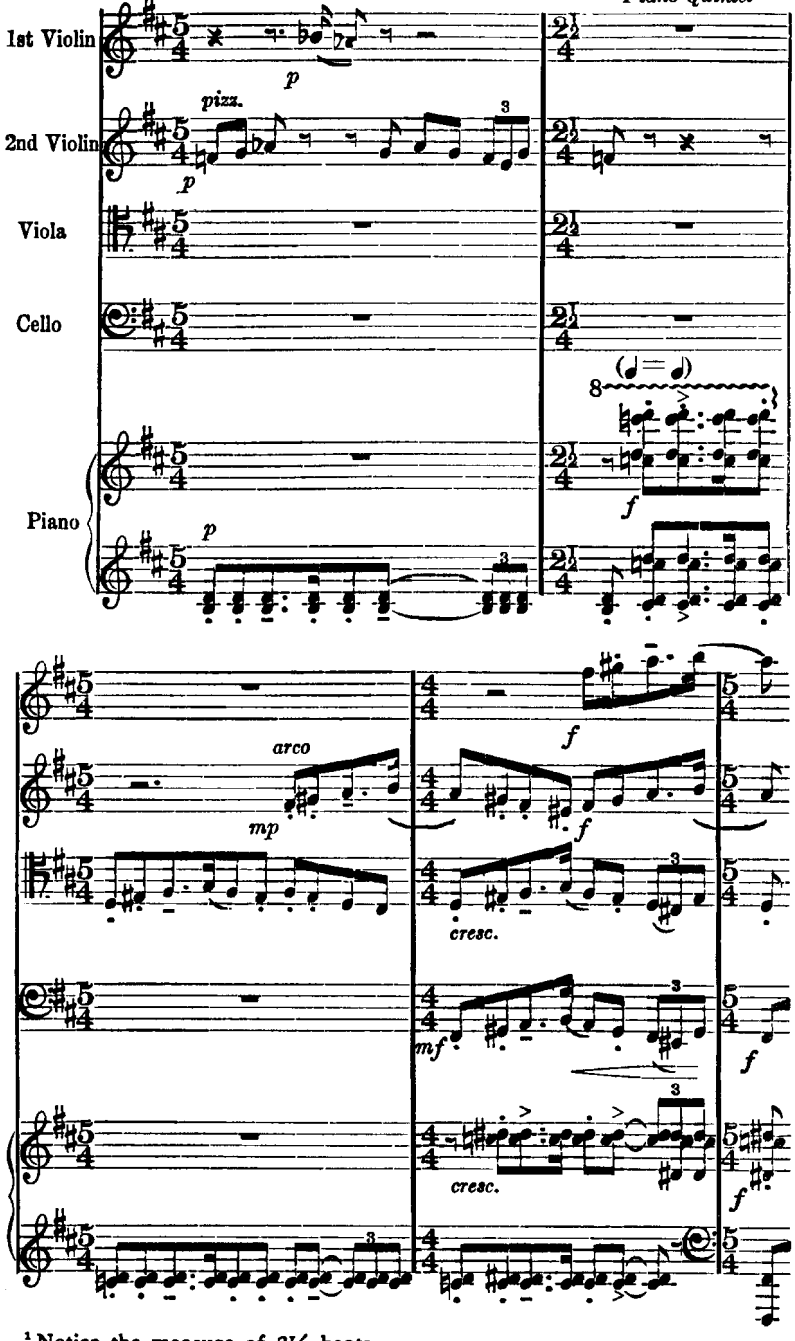
and many others, are as suave and chaste in their lyricism as the purest melodies of the classics. But on the whole, however, Ravel tends to be objective and the beauty of his music, disdaining the facile confidences of romantic art, resides in the style itself rather than in any qualities of "expressiveness".

Florent Schmitt was born in Lorraine (1870) and his music shows clearly the traces of his double Latin and Teutonic heredity. Clarity and balance of form, sensuous harmonies, acute sensitiveness in matters of sonority, in short, traits which we usually think of as being more or less Gallic, alternate or unite with the more Germanic ideals of ponderous force, of imposing construction and of abundance and depth of feeling.

Being of fiery and impetuous temperament, Schmitt naturally revels in the world of rhythm and many are the contributions which he has made to this aspect of modern music. As early as 1908, to take but a single example, we find him, in the last movement of the *Piano Quintet,* wielding a type of metre, based on unequal measures, that was later to become a marked feature of Stravinsky's style.[1]

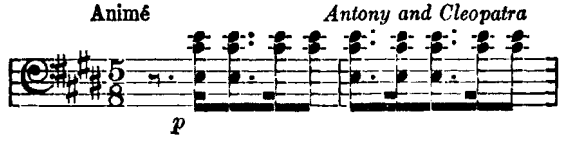
[1] Schmitt, however, cannot be said to have "influenced" Stravinsky.

Piano Quintet [1]



[1] Notice the measure of 2½ beats.

He delights and particularly excels in rhythms of nervous force and movement which, like the following,



become positively sinister by virtue of their insistence and whose violence and abandon often, as in "Orgies",[1] rise to the point of frenzy.

There is something titanic about the man. Not only his rhythms, but his themes, so long in line and so lavish of emotional intensity, his luxuriant harmonies, the extraordinary opulence of his counterpoint and last, but not least, the barbaric splendor and color of his orchestra all point to a personality of more richness and power than is usually granted even to men of genius. Instinctively, therefore, Schmitt turns for expression to the grandiose, the ponderous and the mighty. He erects those gigantic and monumental constructions like the "Psalm",[2] the "Piano Quintet" and "Antony and Cleopatra", which, coming from a feebler pen, would be "as sounding brass and tinkling cymbals", but which, at his hands, have acquired the overwhelming force and that sense of inevitability which only the very great can achieve.

Yet one feels that, after all, it would be impossible to imprison within the pages of even such scores the tumult and the torment of a soul like Schmitt's. For the man is fundamentally insatiable. He is athirst for the infinite and no matter how far he may push his lust for intensity of feeling, one knows in advance that he will never quite

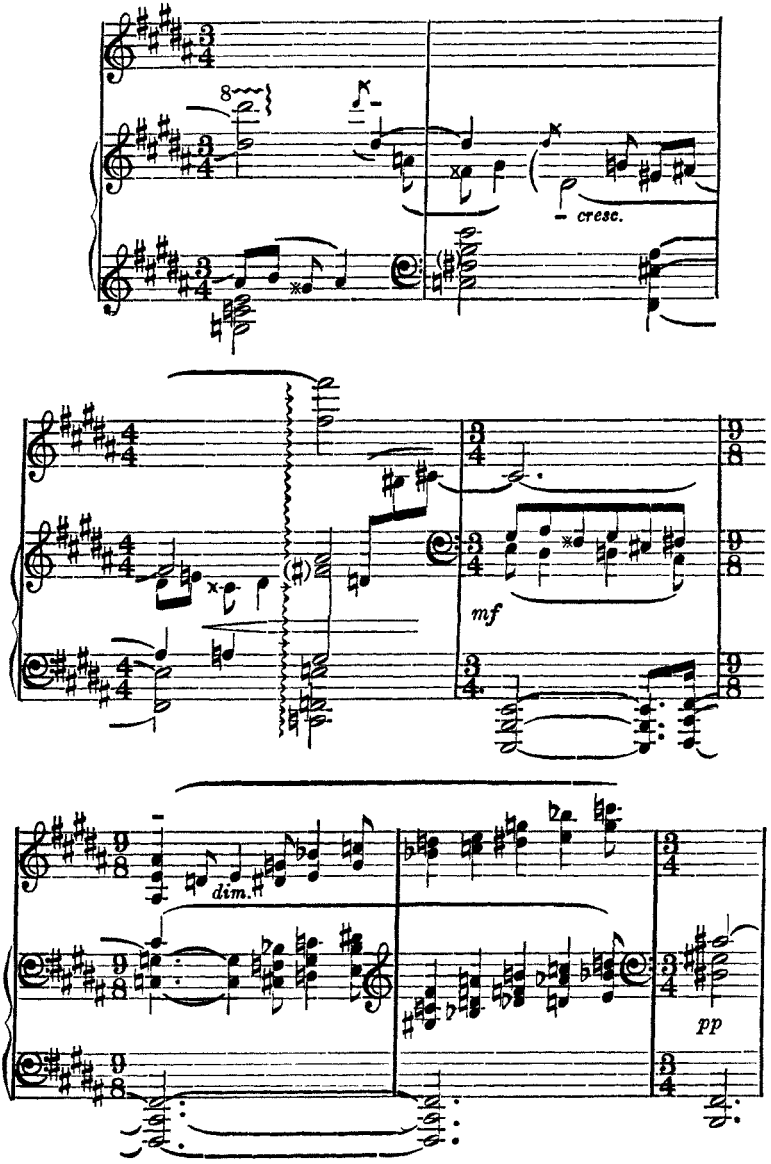
[1] Also from "Antony and Cleopatra": Symphonic preludes and interludes for the drama, after Shakespeare, by André Gide.
[2] For chorus, soprano solo, organ and orchestra.

reach the limit of his desires, that there will always be something more that remains ungiven, unexpressed. And in this abundance of reserve strength lies the chief secret of his power.

In the work of such a temperament, one might expect to find that note of ironic bitterness and disillusion which so often accompanies the sense of human defeat. But with Schmitt's music, such is not the case. To the composer of "The Tragedy of Salomé" has been given the rare privilege of rendering the torture of a soul in exile without ever, in so doing, falling into the snares of a futile and destructive pessimism. The immense suffering and solitude which are the glorious lot of every genius, have been sublimated by Schmitt into a life of impetuous and creative activity: no one, more than he, arouses in us the love and need of living to the full the brief span of our existence. To a generation which (by a reaction that, in its day, was necessary) was given the taste for "precious" trifles and rare sensations, Schmitt's solid and impassioned music offers the opportunity of dwelling, for a moment, in those high, free regions where, if to suffer means to live more intensely, even suffering is a joy. Hence he belongs among the leaders of men, among those who have brought us light and consolation.

A single quotation from "Dreams",[1] to illustrate the richness of Schmitt's style and to justify the plea that his works be given the more frequent hearings and the wider recognition which their greatness merits.

[1] For orchestra.



Albert Roussel, born 1869, took up music as a profession relatively late in life. Only in 1894 did he abandon

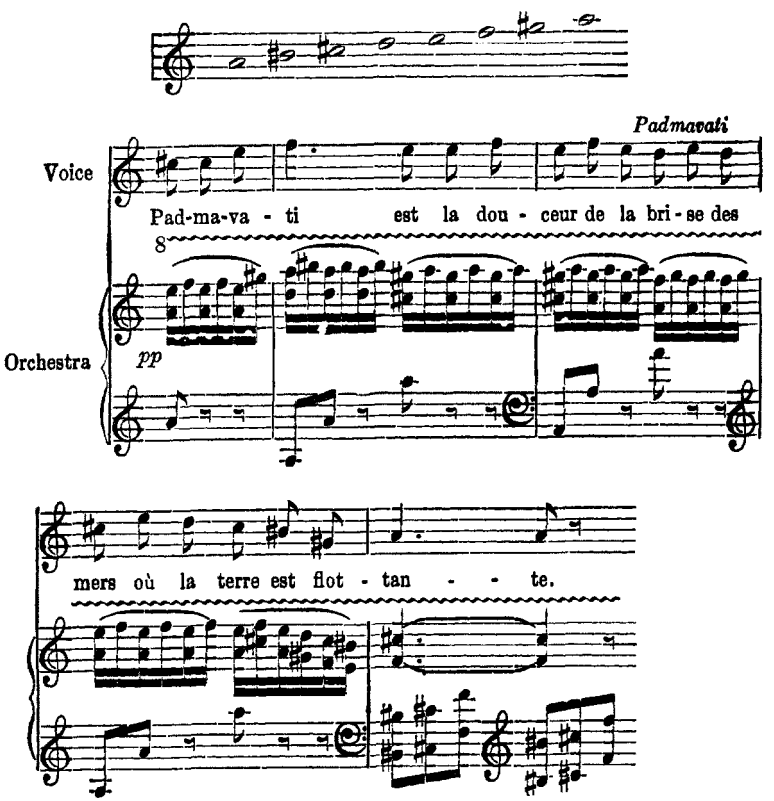
his earlier career of a naval officer and come to Paris, at the age of twenty-five, to study harmony, counterpoint, fugue and composition, first with Gigout, and later with d'Indy at the Schola Cantorum. All his works bear, in indefinable manner, the evidence of his late start, of a discipline accepted only after the most supple of his formative years were passed. This circumstance of his education explains, perhaps, a certain awkwardness in his harmony, an awkwardness which has nothing to do with the dissonance or modernity of his idiom and which is far more a source of individuality than it is a handicap.

But a personality of Roussel's force needed no external, fortuitous strokes of fortune to develop and fix its natural originality. In all contemporary French music there is no more independent spirit than he and it is exceedingly difficult to trace the influences which assisted in the formation of his language. The "cellular" treatment and "cyclical" form of an early work like the "Trio" op. 2 (1902) are doubtless reminiscent of those severe principles of musical form embodied in d'Indy's monumental "Treatise on Composition".

But the years which Roussel spent in India when he was still an officer of the navy, and his visit to the Orient in 1909-10 were certainly of greater formative significance than the influence of any of his teachers. He is the most exotic of French composers in the sense that his exoticism represents something more than a simple curiosity of a sensibility ever on the alert for new experiences, new sensations. The orientalism of a work like "Padmavati",[1] for instance, is not confined to external touches of local color, to the facile effects of a strange and foreign atmosphere. It penetrates to the depths of the Eastern spirit, is

[1] An "opera-ballet".

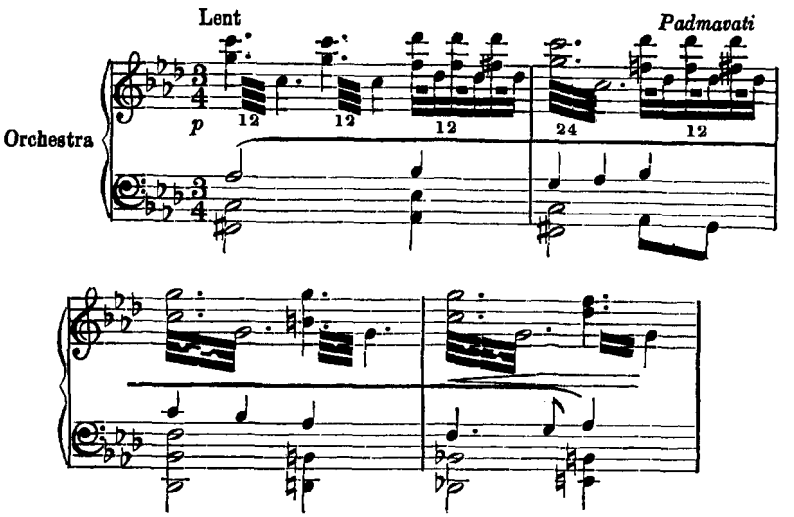
saturated with that sense of fatality, of immobility and non-existence that veils and obscures the savage intensity of oriental instincts and desires. The following phrase, so extraordinary for its feeling of dreamlike volubility, is quite typical of this side of Roussel's temperament and will serve also to illustrate his thoroughly natural use of oriental idioms. Both the melody and the accompaniment of the entire passage, from which I cite only a few bars, is based on the unaltered notes of this scale:



It is not easy to make Roussel's acquaintance, because his language is so essentially orchestral, that piano transcrip-

tions give little idea of its beauty or its power. There is also this difficulty, namely, that modern ears are relatively unaccustomed to listening to music conceived melodically rather than harmonically, and Roussel's idiom, even when it is homophonic, is distinctly "horizontal". To appreciate it, therefore, one must hear it "horizontally", must follow lines rather than chords.

Roussel has yet to receive the recognition and fame that are due him. His fine and delicate ballet, "The Spider's Feast", is fast becoming a modern classic, but his "Evocations",[1] "For a Spring Fête" [1] and "Padmavati", are still, in spite of occasional performances, relatively unknown, even in France. Yet, as these few measures testify,

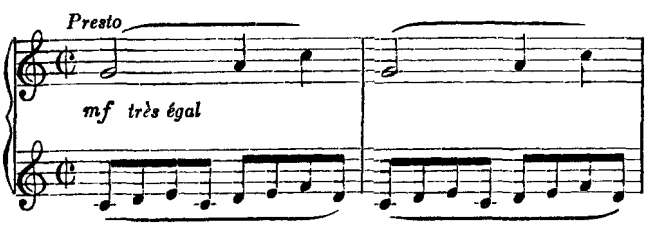


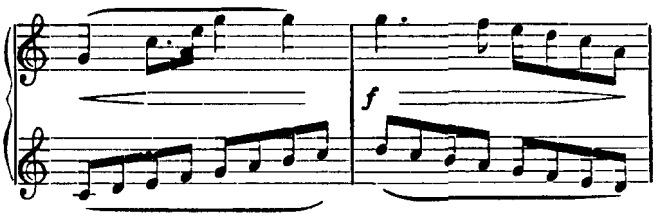
the man has developed an extraordinarily personal style which cannot be confused with that of any other living composer and one can say, with little risk, that his work promises to hold an increasingly important place in contemporary music.

[1] For orchestra.

Honegger, Poulenc, Milhaud, Auric, Durey and Mademoiselle Tailleferre will probably, merely as a matter of convenience, be known for some time as "The Group of the Six". Yet as far as their æsthetics are concerned, they have little in common except a general tendency toward a more or less objective view of their art, a tendency which is characteristic of most recent music and which Roland-Manuel has in mind when he says that "It is no longer the driver who interests us, but the machine which he has set in motion". (*Ce n'est plus le mécanicien qui nous émeuvra, c'est la machine qu'il aura mise en marche.*)

Following, to some extent, in the footsteps of Eric Satie, —an uneven composer, but not without originality and genius—and even more out of absolute necessity, for it was the only thing to do, these young composers have tried to react against musical impressionism. But each one has reacted in his own way. Milhaud has done interesting experiments in jazz rhythms and polyharmony (viz., the simultaneous use of two or more keys). Auric and Poulenc, especially the latter, have striven for extreme simplicity, have restored to music, as Ravel did more significantly and in other ways, the pleasure of being just music, that is, a succession of agreeable sounds composed without any thought of subjective or dramatic expression. Poulenc's work, as one can see from these few bars of the opening movement in the "Suite for Piano",





is full of charm. It bears unmistakably the stamp of a born musician and has all the exquisite freshness and spontaneity of youth, for the composer is still but a young man. Consequently, it is too early to attempt any judgment as to the ultimate significance of his work, for, to do so, would be to make prophecies about music that is still to be written. But of the reality and worth of Poulenc's gifts, there can be no doubt.

The most important figure in the group is unquestionably Arthur Honegger. Though he was born in Le Havre (1892) and received the greater part of his musical education in France, Honegger is of Swiss origin and a Swiss subject. He has a quite extraordinary capacity for musical assimilation. Bach, Handel, Wagner, Debussy, Schoenberg and Strawinsky have all contributed to the formation of his language, a language which, because of the very catholicity of the composer's culture, is still in process of evolution. One feels instinctively that the real, the best Honegger is yet to come with his steadily advancing acquisition of a perfected and more highly personal idiom.

He has himself summed up the guiding principles of his æsthetics in a letter which he wrote in September, 1920, to the music critic of "La Victoire". "I attach great importance to the architecture of music and would not like to see it sacrificed to considerations of a literary or pictorial order. . . . My great model is J. S. Bach. . . . I do not, like certain anti-impressionist musicians, seek a

return to harmonic simplicity. On the contrary, I feel that we should use the harmonic materials created by the school which preceded us, but that we should use them in a different way, as a basis for lines and rhythms".

On the whole, Honegger has lived up to these principles which seem to augur a return to the objectivity and formal beauty of classic music. His works are characterized by power of construction, richness of polyphony, athletic rhythms and contrapuntal dissonance, that is, dissonance which results from the shock of melodic lines rather than the structure of chords.

It is difficult to say just why Honegger's idiom is personal, for there is nothing about his style which distinguishes it definitely from that of his contemporaries. Lyric in character, it remains so even when the objectivity of the theme [1] would seem to preclude all possibility of lyricism and one is at a loss to explain the directness of the power which it exercises over us. From a work like "King David",[2] there radiates a sort of magnetic energy that escapes analysis, that seizes upon and holds the imagination with all the suddenness and tenacity of a Handelian chorus and which establishes at once the greatness and permanence of the work.

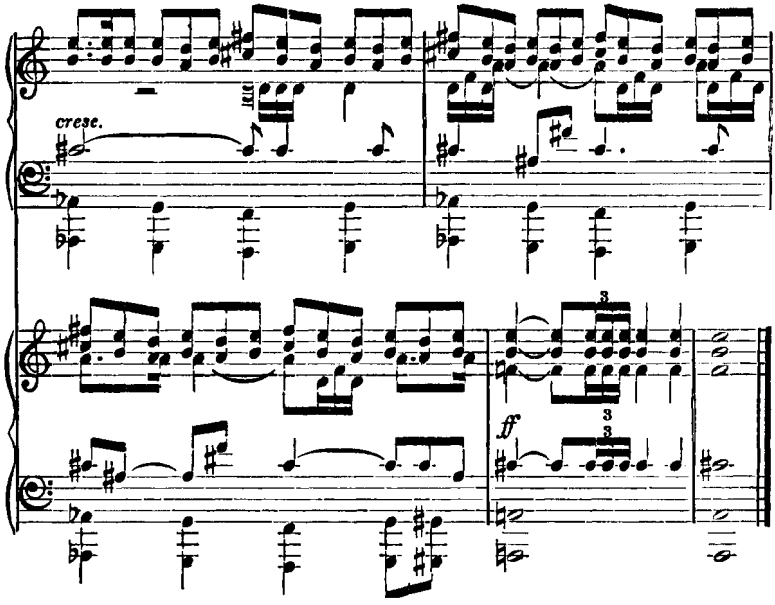
Honegger's chief compositions are written for the orchestra: "Summer Pastorale", "Horace Victorious", "Prelude for *The Tempest*", "Song of Joy", and "Pacific 231". With the exception of the "Summer Pastorale" (which is relatively homophonic and not, therefore, fully typical), they lose their distinctive merits when transcribed for piano. The vigor and complexity of the counterpoint disappear in the evanescent, uniform sonority of a percussion instru-

[1] As in "Pacific" where even the mechanistic becomes a pretext for lyricism.

[2] A "dramatic poem" for chorus, organ and orchestra.

ment. But "King David", which brought the composer quick and well deserved fame, is, for the most part, more amenable to transcription and can be domesticated with equal pleasure and profit.

The following measures from a "Cortège" in "King David" offer a fair example of his more dissonant manner and are likewise interesting for their successful superposition of four different keys: F minor, F♯ major, D minor and E minor.



Pierre Menu (1896–1919) is little known, for he died when only twenty-three years of age. But by virtue of that mystery which so often permits those who disappear young to express themselves with authority at an age when most people are still seeking their way in life, he gave the impression of having already quite found himself and one could not help but be impressed by the amazing maturity

of his character and his art. In five brief years, from 1914 to 1919, he wrote, during all the anguish and turmoil of the war, a series of works, almost any one of which would ordinarily have been sufficient to gain him distinguished recognition, for all of them bear the indefinable but certain mark of genius. To speak adequately of the qualities which they reveal—their originality, their prodigious technical mastery, the extraordinary power of expression which makes them vibrant with life, the rhythmic force, the rich harmonies and, most of all, their deep tenderness and humanity—would require far more space than we have at our disposal. Fortunately, however, the music itself is so eloquent that, if given the more frequent performance which it merits, it will speak in its own name and will do far more for the memory of Pierre Menu than any testimonies of admiration.

I shall leave to another the task of commenting on the music of my sister, Lili Boulanger (1893-1918).

"In every page of her work, this young girl conciliates the grave power, the authority and rhythmical energy of a man with a certain joyfulness, with the faculty of tender revery suddenly carried to the point of violent and impassioned anguish; that is to say, with traits characteristic at once of a woman who has divined all the tragedies of the human heart and of a child as innocent and as bent by fate as the poor little princess Maleine whose destiny, a symbol of her own, she sought to interpret.[1] Between her soul and ours there is no intermediary; one does not stop to think of technical procedure, of study or talent. The sonorities awaken—and instantaneously a poetry and a sensibility impose themselves upon us with imperious and persuasive gentleness. Even when Mademoiselle Boulan-

[1] The reference is to her unfinished opera, "Princesse Maleine" on a text by Maeterlinck.

ger is commenting on the verses of another, it seems as though the words were her own. So perfectly does she adapt herself to them, that she remoulds them, gives them new meaning."

The musician who, in a few years, composed "The Three Psalms", "Faust and Helen", "Rifts in the Sky" (*Clairières dans le Ciel*),[1] the "Hindu Prayer",[2] and "Princesse Maleine", not to mention ten other compositions, no one of which is of indifferent value, is not a beginner of doubtful promise, but a creative spirit who has accomplished a task and won a place.

"The exquisite and intense figure of Lili Boulanger, facing, without flinching, her terrible destiny, ennobling with her charity the hours which she knew were inexorable, will not move only musicians. She deserves to have symbolic value for all artists and writers who bow with pity and respect before the mystery of premature departures".[3]

Of the many gaps in this brief essay and of its manifest shortcomings, I am only too conscious. It ought rather to have been entitled "A Few Figures in Recent French Music", for the composers whom we seem to have forgotten in it are so numerous and many of them so distinguished that it is better not even to mention them, but to leave to my readers the duty of supplying names and data with which they are all familiar.

By way of conclusion, I could do no better than to quote a paragraph of a recent letter from Roussel, which sums up with clarity and precision what would seem to be the main directives in the latter part of the period we have been studying. "The tendencies of contemporary music", says

[1] Songs.
[2] For chorus and orchestra.
[3] From Camille Mauclair's article on "The Life and Works of Lili Boulanger," in the 1921, August Number of the *Revue Musicale.*

Roussel, "indicate a return to clearer, sharper lines, more precise rhythms, a style more horizontal than vertical; to a certain brutality, at times, in the means of expression—in contrast with the subtle elegance and vaporous atmosphere of the preceding period; to a more attentive and sympathetic attitude toward the robust frankness of a Bach or a Handel; in short, a return, in spite of appearances and with a freer though still somewhat hesitating language, to the traditions of the Classics."